Melbourne Orphanage

1926 – 1965
Other Names: • Windemere

Details

The Melbourne Orphanage was established in 1926. It was formerly the Melbourne Orphan Asylum. It was located in Brighton where it accommodated boys and girls aged between 3 and 16. By the 1950s, some children were housed in group homes in Glen Waverley. In 1965, it became the Melbourne Family Care Organisation.

The Melbourne Orphanage came into being in 1926. Formerly, the institution had been known as the Melbourne Orphan Asylum. It was situated at 'Windemere', in Butler Street, Brighton.

Butler's history of the first 100 years of the institution discusses some changes to the buildings and equipment at Melbourne Orphanage from 1926. That year, a radio Master Set was installed in the boys' cottage, as well as loudspeakers in other cottages so all children could listen. By 1930 a new and larger swimming pool had been built.

In 1932, the Managing Director of Bryant and May donated motor driven lathes and other machinery to the Orphanage and it began to offer an engineering class in the carpentry class room. Later this was demolished and the equipment was moved to a new brick technical school erected in its place (Butler, 1951).

During World War Two in 1940 the Orphanage took precautions in case of air raids. This included digging five sets of trenches (one for each cottage), and preparing sheltered rooms on the ground floor of each cottage. Staff and children were trained during day and night air raid drills.

The Orphanage had previously largely confined itself to "orphans", that is a child with no living parents. During the years of World War Two, with many men away fighting, the committee decided to expand and admit other children, those who were deemed to be neglected. According to Butler, from this time, Melbourne Orphanage increasingly housed children from "broken homes".

In 1954 the Orphanage appointed a social worker, at the time still not a common profession.

In January 1956, the Melbourne Orphanage was declared an approved children's home under the Children's Welfare Act 1954.

The school on the site of the Melbourne Orphanage was the Brighton Beach State School (no 2048) and it educated children from the Orphanage and from the local community. The school's centenary history, published in 1978, referred to its "special character imparted by the presence of orphans. Friendships were formed, but the camaderie of the children at Windemere distinguished them."

A student at Brighton Beach in the late 1950s remembered his friendship with children from Melbourne Orphanage, who were allowed to come home with him to play as long as he had a note from his parents. Kids at the school played together in the orphanage gardens and in the "big drain".

He also recalled how, on Fridays, the Orphanage cooked fish and chips for their children, who happily swapped their meals for the "outsider" children's cut lunches.

Brighton Beach State School had access to the Orphanage's facilities. A student from the 1950s remembered his "Handwork" classes at the Orphanage:

> *We had to assemble before a gate that connected with the Melbourne Orphanage and then proceed to a big work-room. Handwork was a very relaxing and worthwhile subject (we made things like toothbrush holders, marionettes and masks) … Brighton Beach was somewhat special because it taught Handwork – few other schools had access to the facilities that the Orphanage offered.*

A former resident who had been there during the 1950s described physical and emotional abuse she had endured while at the Orphanage, as well as the work she was made to perform, which included "polishing the landings on the main staircase at the entrance daily, on my hands and knees with a housebrick wrapped in cloth" (submission 180).

In 1956, in view of overseas trends, a commitment was made to move out of the Orphanage in Brighton into family group homes. These were located in the Glen Waverly vicinity, with an administrative and counselling facility in Ferntree Gully Road.

The phasing in of Family Group homes began in 1959 and was completed in 1963 with 14 family group homes established. The Melbourne Orphanage building in Brighton was demolished.

A name change in 1965 to the Melbourne Family Care Organisation reflected this new direction.

Gallery

Melbourne Orphanage, Brighton

Description: This is a panoramic photgraph of the Melbourne Orphanage site at Brighton. It shows the main orphanage building in the centrer of the image, with two further buildings on each side. All buildings are tw-storey bluestone buildings. The central building is the most ornate, with a central spire and many large windows. There are ornate gardens and paths in the foreground. This photograph is undated. The date included is an estimate.

Melbourne Orphanage, Brighton, Vic.

Description: View from driveway of front facade of orphanage

Little girls at Melbourne Orphanage, Brighton

Description: Group of little girls in pyjamas, seated on and around a bed, looking at books, one playing a flute, one looking at the camera [from SLV catalogue]

Little girls at Melbourne Orphanage, Brighton

Description: Group of girls in dining room, standing next to tables, eyes closed and hands clasped [from SLV catalogue].

Girls in cookery class, Melbourne Orphanage, Brighton

Description: Girls standing in classroom near wooden tables, bowls and jars on wooden tables, some standing with baked goods, all girls wearing calf length smocks with ribbons in their hair.

Little girls at Melbourne Orphanage, Brighton

Description: Group of little girls in panamas, sitting in groups on beds, some with toys and dolls, a woman standing with hands behind her back in right foreground [from SLV catalogue].

Children, Melbourne Orphanage, Brighton

Description: Line of little boys and girls, holding hands, man in centre holding a child's hand on either side, Brighton Orphanage building in background [from SLV catalogue].

More info

Chronology

- Melbourne Orphan Asylum (1853 - 1926)
  - **Melbourne Orphanage (1926 – 1965)**
    - Melbourne Family Care Organisation (1965 - 1987)
      - Family Action (1987 - 1993)
        - OzChild (1993 - current)

Related Entries

Ran
- Family Group Homes run by Melbourne Family Care (1959 - 1990s)

Related Events
- Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia (2003 - 2005)

Resources

- Cornish, Jennie, *Melbourne Orphanage Reunion: 'priceless'*, OzChild website, 2007
- Wills, Maurice, *The envelope*, 1990
- Butler, J.C., *The first hundred years: being a brief history of the Melbourne Orphanage from 1851-1951*, 1951
- Crawford, Beryle, *Submission no 345 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*, 2005
- Steele, Geoffrey, *Submission no 506 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*, 2005
- Name withheld, *Submission no 465 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*, 2005

- Forster, Geoffrey, *Submission no 456 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*, 2005
- Smith, Hazel, *Submission no 376 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*, 2004
- Smith, H.L., *Out of darkness into light: a journey to find home: a compelling true story:*, 2003
- *An Act Denies Young Kerrie Her Own Home*, The Herald, 29 September 1953
- Murphy, Teresa, *Institutional child abuse: Brighton's house of horrors*, Bayside Review Local, 29 January 2013
- Rule, Andrew, *Two sides to the story of orphan care Read more: http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/two-sides-to-the-story-Two sides to the story of orphan care*, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 November 2009
- Adrian, *Personal Story by Adrian*, Care Leavers Australia Network (CLAN) website, November 2000
- Yates, Thomas E., *Growing up in Melbourne Orphanage 1939?1948*, 2016

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- Melbourne Orphan Asylum Records (1845 - 1986)
- OzChild Records (c. 1956 - current)
- Victorian Children's Aid Society Records (1893 - 1993)
- 'Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files [Charities Board of Victoria] (1923 - 1983)

You can view this page online by visiting https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/melbourne-orphanage/